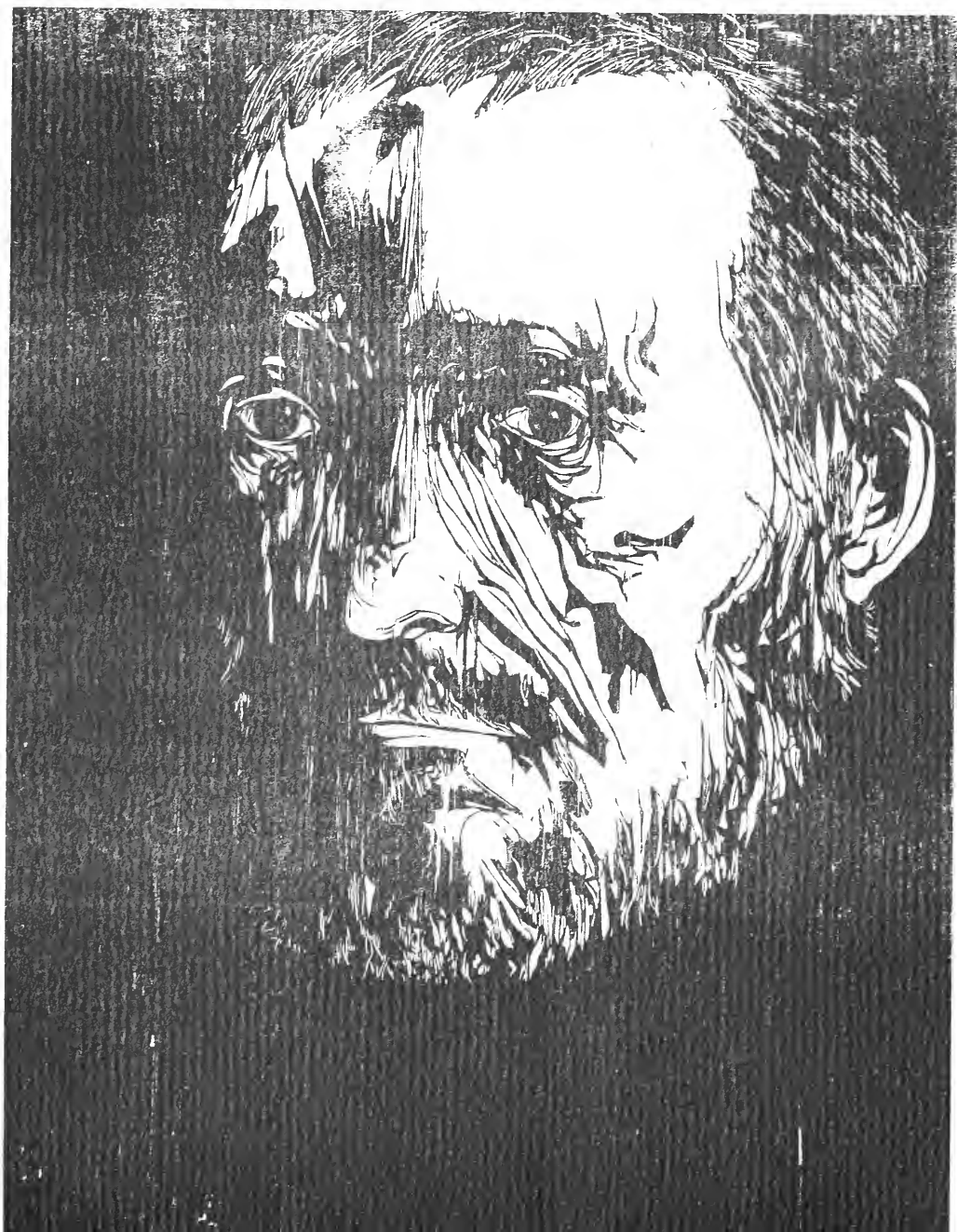


Four Quarters

VOL. XXV NO. 3 SPRING 1976 SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation



Four Quarters

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE FACULTY OF LA SALLE COLLEGE
PHILA., PA. 19141

VOL. XXV, No. 3

SPRING, 1976

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Act of Love, story by Sydney Scott</i> | 3 |
| <i>Vietnam Poems, by Ron Carter</i> | 13 |
| <i>Hilda Halfheart's Notes to the Milkman, Numbers 13 and 26,</i> <i>poems by Ruth Moon Kempher</i> | 16 |
| <i>A Fine and Dandy Breakaway, story by Michael Koch</i> | 17 |
| <i>Haiku, by P. W. Gray</i> | 27 |
| <i>For Andrew at Three Months, poem by Joseph Meredith</i> | 28 |
| <i>My Grandmother's Wake, vignette by Dan Rodden</i> | 29 |
| <i>Ancient History, poem by M. L. Hester, Jr.</i> | 32 |
| <i>The Harrowing, story by T. Alan Broughton</i> | 33 |
| <i>Doves Exist, poem by Anthony Harrington</i> | 42 |

Cover: "Thomas Eakins," woodcut by Leonard Baskin.
Reproduced courtesy of La Salle Study Collection.

Published quarterly in Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer by the faculty of La Salle College, 20th & Olney Aves., Phila., Pa. 19141. Subscriptions: \$3.00 annually, \$5.00 for two years. ©1976 by La Salle College. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope. Available in Microform from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, Mich., 48106. Indexed in American Humanities Index. Second class postage paid at Philadelphia, Pa.

Marginalia . . .

POETRY READERS DESERVE A BREAK

Listening to my favorite poet, Richard Wilbur, introduce his poem, "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World," I suddenly had a startling, heretical question pop into my head. Mr. Wilbur was merely explaining that the poem had its beginning when he was awakened one morning by the sound of squeaky clothes lines outside his apartment window. I had always liked this poem, but never felt that I understood all of the allusions and images until that moment. The poet's comment had given me the context I needed, and the poem became clearer in tone, imagery, and allusions because of something I had learned that was not actually stated in the poem itself. Examine the opening lines of the poem with the above information in mind and you can see for yourself how it helps open up the poem to the reader:

*The eyes open to a cry of pulleys,
And spirited from sleep, the astounded soul
Hangs for a moment bodiless and simple
As false dawn.*

*Outside the open window
The morning air is all awash with angels.*

How long would it have taken you to appreciate the pun on "awash" or the metaphor of "angels" if you didn't associate "the cry of pulleys" with clothes lines?

The heretical question I found myself entertaining was simply this: "Why don't more contemporary poets furnish us with the context we need in order to read the poem intelligently? Why can't they tell the reader in print what they would normally tell an audience in a reading? Such questions seem heretical to one who drank in the New Critics along with his Schlitz in college, forming his reading habits on the principle that the poem and only the poem mattered.

Seeking to exorcise the devil of biographical-historical criticism from my consciousness, I took down my copy of Brooks and Warren's Understanding Poetry from the shelf. Surprisingly, I read in the preface to the Third Edition the following clarification of the authors' position:

Poems are written by human beings and the form of the poem is an individual's attempt to deal with a specific problem, poetic and personal.

(Continued on page 43)

Act of Love

SYDNEY SCOTT

EARLY IN THE MORNING is her favorite time, when the bay is smooth and fresh, reflecting the shoreline in undistorted detail like a tinted mirror. Then if Cecily sits on the pier barely breathing and staring hard she can make the vast expanse of water become an entrance to another world, silent and calm, suffused with a mysterious and intangible enchantment like the pen and ink drawings in old fairy tale books. Cecily holds herself as still as the crouched tri-colored cat beside her, bending her head lower, looking down, down into the water, squinting her eyes slightly so that she will not see the edge of the shoreline, waiting for it to happen, for the new sensation to come upon her. Yes, it is starting! There are the familiar shivers along her back and there is the strange blurring of her eyes, an almost painful straining of the muscles. Then it appears—a different world—the same trees and brush, the same pier, but soft and shimmering and brinkless, as if she could simply float into it with the slightest effort of will, could diffuse her difficult being within that soft tranquility. A practical child, ever scornful of adult sentimentality and the make-believe games of other children, she struggles, nevertheless, to give dimension and depth to the mirrored scene; yet at the same time she is afraid, dizzy with fear before this phenomenon of her own creation.

When the exhilaration reaches its peak—when it seems as if her very life depends upon the precarious equilibrium of the fascination that draws her small, incompletely formed face closer to the slick surface of the water and the fear that holds it back—Cecily feels intensely happy. She stretches her arm down and touches the water with the tip of her blue pocketknife's narrow blade—which flashes like a ray of the new sun—then stares as the expanding ripples gently undulate the reflection of her face. Up and down and outward, slow like a caress, her face soft and relaxed, moving as everything

about it moves, resting, restful. Is that her face, or this above, which feels hard like granite with bent neck aching?

"Cecily! Ce-ci-lee-e! Time for school!"

Cecily lets out her breath explosively against the shrill voice that shatters her spell. She stands, brushes off her jeans, and pockets her knife.

Before she leaves the pier Cecily bends down and gently lifts upon her crouched knees, holding the small animal close against her chest, pressing her face, eyes clenched, against the white stomach. She wants only to hold the cat here like this all day and feel its warmth against her cheek beginning, and its heart beating, pumping its livingness against her. But the intolerable reality of this day is growing inside her now, pushing like tears behind her eyes. Further lingering will, she knows with the hard, slow wisdom of the ages, only intensify the torment. Later she will have to think—about this afternoon and what she will have to do—but not now, not before the ordeal of school. Even on her last day she will be expected to produce laborious answers to boring questions (What are the main exports of Peru?) and pages of computations for problems that could all be the same problem ($15/16 \div 29/39 = ?$) "You could do much better if only you would apply yourself," her teacher keeps saying, the thin dark brows over round shiny eyes drawn together until they almost touch. Always Cecily makes the same wordless response, lowering her eyes, turning her head slightly to the side. "You are wasting yourself with such laziness. And a teacher's daughter, too!" Wasting herself. What does that mean? She senses it would be impudent to ask. Besides, she is always too tired. At the new school it will be exactly the same.

She puts the cat down almost roughly and turns away without a backward glance. When she walks straight and hard, it is all right. As she climbs the steps toward the weathered beach house, now the same grey as the pier, Cecily's posture gradually changes. Her shoulders straighten, the angle of the head become stiff, almost defiant, and even her gait quickens, until by the time she pushes open the back door she has assumed a look of extreme self-containment that is at once incongruous with and strangely natural to her thin ten-year-old body with its face that seems composed almost entirely of sharp points.

Her mother is smartly dressed in a spotless white blouse with wide sleeves gathered evenly together by smooth cuffs at her wrists. Her blue skirt is exactly knee length, and her

legs gleam slickly through her nylons. Cecily squints a bit against the effect of brightness. For a moment she almost feels sympathy for her mother, a woman who achieves her happiness through the easy enthusiasm of young children. It is the most eager who interest her, and her expression comes closest to contentment as she describes the accomplishments of these pupils (two or three each year) their delightful ingenuousness, their unselfconscious affection for her. Surely a mother and daughter were never so mismatched.

"Look at you!" Her mother rolls her eyes upward in a caricature of hopeless resignation. "At least comb your hair, Cecily. And wash your hands." She turns to Cecily's father as if for comfort and support, but he pays no attention to the familiar scene. He stands staring out the window, transformed by his blue Air Force uniform from the pot bellied, beer drinking, television watching man he is every evening into a figure of elusive authority, the silver emblem on the plastic bill of his hat gleaming impressively in the morning sun.

Without a word Cecily turns and goes into the bedroom. "I hate you I hate you I hate you." She moves her lips, bringing the brush down hard through her tangled colorless hair each time she mouths the "hate." At least her mother has given up trying to get her to wear dresses, which Cecily despises because in them she feels both exposed and disguised, with her perpetually bruised and scabbed arms and legs jutting like weathered driftwood from the ruffles and bows. She knows she lacks that certain rosiness and cuteness other children seem to possess. Unable to masquerade as the child her parents want, the kind they approve of and praise, the type of little girl her mother had been (how unlike Cecily is from those sepia-toned photographs of a blonde rounded dimpled angel in lace dress and shiny shoes) she defends by a certain exaggeration an essence of herself she feels endangered. I must walk straight and hard, she reminds herself. The faded boy's jeans she insists on wearing every day are now like an extension of her own hard body.

When she comes out of the bathroom, Cecily picks up the book she will return to the library and walks quickly through the room hoping to escape another inspection. Though her eyes are directed straight ahead, she winds her way through the partially packed boxes on the floor effortlessly, as if by radar. Tomorrow they and all their possessions will be gone, leaving the house as barren as it had been when they first saw it less than a year ago.

In the back of the car Cecily opens her book with a cen-

turies-old sigh, knowing it is best not to listen to them talk about the move as if it had no more meaning than the drive to town. Instead she concentrates on a story she has read before, a tale about some remarkable children who are transported to another land where they become rulers.

"I tell you, that's none of your business!" she hears her father say loudly.

"It most certainly is my business. It humiliates me, and I won't have it. Do you hear me? I won't have it!" Her mother's voice sounds teary and hysterical. Cecily tries to read. She has heard them go on like this many times before, always the same quarrel everywhere they live. "We have a chance to start over now, a new place, new people who don't know anything," her mother says evenly after a period of silence. "Please don't ruin it for me this time."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Well, you'd better figure it out, Casanova!"

Cecily sees the glint of her mother's eyes as she turns her face toward her father, who shifts his grip on the steering wheel and clamps his mouth tightly shut. Such energy put into the same quarrel for all the years she could remember! Where do they get such energy? She, on the other hand, feels so groggy she can hardly hold her head up. Cecily has seen enough places to be able to think of them as essentially alike. She is an observant, seeing child, a listening child equipped with precocious fragments of knowledge that would surprise most people. Yet she cannot understand the force that drives her parents to present all their disagreements in the form of this argument.

Her father pulls into the school drive and stops the car. His silence is maintained as Cecily and her mother get out.

At school Cecily sits quietly pretending to listen while waiting for recess. But it is not for play that she waits. They are different from her, these children at school. They do not like her. Perhaps they believe she looks down on them, her mother being a teacher and all. (In the room next door Cecily's mother is standing, or perhaps sitting on her desk, in front of the fourth graders, a year before Cecily and her fellow fifth graders, the sound but not the sense of her voice penetrating the dividing wall). It is always the same at every new school. The others know immediately. Something is wrong with her, and though she tries to be like them, tries to enjoy the things they like to do, other children know with silent, uncanny intuition that she is an imposter, to be ignored and shunned. Why do they, how do they make it come out of their

bodies at her so she can feel their hate through the air like gusts of gritty wind against sunburned skin?

WHEN AT LAST she is out of the classroom she walks slowly, almost shuffles, to hide her sense of release until she reaches the grove of trees at the far corner of the playground. No one else comes here. She sits down against the biggest tree trunk curling herself in a little space formed by the emergence of two large roots, making sure she can not be seen. But today she does not open her book. Instead she lets herself think about the cat, for today is her last chance to take care of her responsibility. She curls herself up tighter, her face in her arms, and lets the images come despite the ache that grows slowly in her chest. The image of the skinny beach cat when she had first seen her, wild and frightened and starving, defending her kittens with the brave snarls of desperation. The image of the cat gulping down the scraps of food Cecily began to bring every day, snarling as she tried to advance. The image of the cat on the first day she had let Cecily touch her, trembling, emitting a low steady growl, but taking the proffered food from the girl's outstretched hand. And finally the image of Mama Kitty when they would be gone—bewildered, crying in that funny throaty voice she had, looking for Cecily, waiting for Cecily to come back again to feed her, to stroke her, to love her. Waiting, waiting. Unable to understand. Bewildered.

Suddenly angry, Cecily remembers the day when her father had told them he was being transferred to a new base, that they would be moving to Texas in two weeks. She remembers how the pain had begun then in her chest when, begging to be allowed to take Mama Kitty, she had watched with growing horror the impassivity of her parents' faces.

"No, we can't possibly," her mother had said, "We won't even have a house for a while, and so we won't have anyplace to keep her. Besides you'll forget all about it in a couple of days."

When Cecily, trembling with the desperation of her control, offered rational suggestions, as to how the cat could be taken, her mother, the face under her fluffed-up hair as hard as slate, simply ignored her.

"Don't you think we should get a new car for the drive, Harold?" she said to Cecily's father, raising her voice pointedly during Cecily's pleas. "And this couch—I think we should leave it and get a new one there."

"She loves me. *Please*, Mother. We can't just *leave* her here!"

"Cecily, I don't want to go through this again."

"But Mother, I *know* what she will think! I *know* what she will feel!"

"For God's sake, shut up about it! Cats don't think."

"Yes, they do, Mother!" Cecily had said, straining her whole body in an attempt to explain. "Maybe not like we do, but I *know* how she'll feel. I just *know*. In her little cat mind she won't understand why we would go off and leave her. But she will know that we did! And she'll be so sad and hurt. Don't you see?"

"Cecily, you heard your mother," her father said in his most threatening voice. "Get to your room, and if I hear one more word about it I'll use my belt!"

"I won't, I won't!" screamed Cecily, enraged, desperate, coming at him with her fists. "You are both terrible people! You don't care about anything, even a defenseless animal!"

Through the noises of her sobs Cecily heard her father say as he left her room, "Goddamned melodramatic kid. Something has to be done about that girl. She's crazy. Maybe she should be locked up."

Sitting under that tree she hates her father for not believing, for accusing her of being melodramatic; she hates her mother for saying she will forget about it all in two days—when more than anything she wishes she did not feel what she felt, wishes she could forget. And she hates herself. What is wrong with her that she cannot be like everyone else?

Afterwards she had gone up and down the bay with Mama Kitty in her arms knocking on doors in spite of her extreme shyness to ask if anyone would take the cat, feed her, and give her a home. Mama Kitty's fur grew wet with Cecily's sweat, its hair clung to her face and tickled her nose. She remembered to walk straight and hard so the cat couldn't sense her fear. "No, we can't take an animal." "We live in the city during the winter." "We have a dog." "We don't like cats." She walked straight and hard.

Now overcome with that same hopelessness, she pushes away the images. Gradually she calms herself. It has been necessary to think of everything one more time—to be absolutely certain there is no other way. She chokes on another sob as, unbidden, the image of Mama Kitty reappears, bewildered, lost, hungry but waiting—Mama Kitty left alone and not even understanding her terrible betrayal. Cecily can't, under any circumstances, let that be. She will have to go through with the plan, the terrifying last resort she had conceived of during the tossing anguish of the night before, which, with a shudder,

she refuses to let herself experience again.

As she wipes her face dry with the soft underside of her arms Cecily watches a small grasshopper near her feet. It jumps on her shoe and does not move when she puts down her hand. Slowly she moves her finger against its body until in order to maintain its balance it is forced to grab onto her skin with its prickly legs. When the bell rings she picks it up impulsively, and feels with a thrill the muscles of its legs jumping rhythmically, like a miniature living heart in the dark damp secret hollow of her curled palm. She takes the grasshopper to her desk in the back of the room, and during the period of silent reading, shielded by her book, she watches the grasshopper, feeling a warm happiness when he sits on her hand no longer afraid, it seems, trusting, complacently cleaning its strong but curiously delicate back legs. Later when she is forced to hide him in her desk Cecily feels a familiar ache in her chest. Is he afraid there among the foreign objects of her books and pencils away from the warmth of the sun? She has removed him on a whim from his natural home, making him by that one thoughtless action totally dependent upon herself for his security, for his very life. Cecily can hardly wait for the lunch bell. When it rings she runs with the grasshopper, who seems more sickly and sluggish now, to her spot in the trees. She sets him gently in the grass, watching intently as he rights himself and hops away, somewhat feebly, it seems. She feels full of a shameful remorse.

IN THE AFTERNOON Cecily rests her head on her arm, sluggish with boredom at the long page of fractions before her. She tries to focus her gaze on the grain of blonde wood of her desk top an inch or so away from her eyes, but though her head aches with the effort, the pattern remains blurred. Absently, she reaches out her hand and scratches the indentation on her desk where her pencil is supposed to fit, then draws back quickly and looks around with studied nonchalance to see if she has been observed. She tries not to think about the itches anymore because if she does she will have to scratch, and Cecily knows that this recent urge of hers to scratch inanimate objects would seem strange to anyone else. But trying not to, makes it worse, so she protects herself, this new strangeness of hers, with a slyness born of long practice in such matters. Very slowly she manages to scratch all around her desk where the top meets the frame without being detected. At night it has become a ritual of hers to scratch every corner of her room,

her bed, her chest-of-drawers. Only then can she sleep, though she still worried about the corners where the walls join the ceiling, which she could not reach even when standing on a chair. Once she had been forced to sneak out and get the broom to scratch them. The relief she had felt was exquisite.

Now Cecily looks at her teacher who is sitting at the table in front of the room grading papers in the heavy afternoon quiet. She can see the rise of Mrs. Langston's stomach under her light smock. Does it hurt to be pregnant and stretched like that? She focuses her eyes on the strangely hypnotic deformity and stares, concentrates, thinking yellow flashes of pain. When Mrs. Langston stirs slightly, Cecily turns her head and pretends to gaze out the window, making her face vacant to belie the thrill that goose pimples her flesh. Is it possible that she has, by an effort of her own will, made Mrs. Langston's swollen, stretched stomach hurt?

When the last bell of the day rings, Cecily sighs inwardly with both fear and relief. She walks slowly to the door, pausing momentarily at the open window. She makes herself appear to be looking at something outside, but her fingers move rhythmically back and forth along the bottom of the radiator cap where it joins the metal tube. Then slowly, her step hardly broken, Cecily leaves the room. She walks straight and hard.

As she waits for her mother to finish her goodbyes, Cecily sits slightly hunched in the car. Her mouth is dry with the fear she can no longer control with a flick of her thoughts, and on the drive home she can manage only monosyllabic answers.

"Well," her mother says as she swings the car into the driveway, "I'll be glad when we're on our way. Maybe then you'll get over that sulky, morgue-like attitude."

Cecily doesn't answer. The exasperation in her mother's voice can no longer reach her. She hears the words now as if from far away, through numbed senses. Without looking at the expression of her mother's face, Cecily climbs out of the car and runs down to the bay. Runs to Mama Kitty, who is waiting.

"Hello, kitty. Hello my pretty kitty," she whispers into the patch of orange behind the cat's right ear. "Come on, let's go on the grass."

Cecily sits rocking the cat in her lap, letting the pet lick her tears with its rough tongue, talking to her softly. "Poor Mama Kitty," she croons jerkily. "Poor Mama Kitty, so good, so good. Your little mind doesn't know. Your little kitty cat mind can't know. You don't know enough to be anything but sweet and loving and good. I wish I could let you understand. Poor little trusting thing."

For a while Cecily whispers to the cat. Then she turns Mama Kitty over on her back and scratches the soft underside, the pulsating throat, until the cat's eyes close and her head leans back, relaxed and purring, and Cecily intent and dry-eyed now, her voice crooning steadily, blending with the loud purr, holding herself carefully with that tense motionlessness of the hypnotist, perfectly still now except for the slow movement of her hands, the left one scratching the cat's vulnerable white throat, the right one moving up inch by inch, until—

The beginning of the scream that tears through Cecily's throat and fills the air with jagged vibrations corresponds exactly with the second thrust of the blue pocket knife's longest blade. The scream is still coming out, when Cecily's mother runs out of the back door. It stops when Cecily jumps up and back, poised in a half-crouch before the blank incomprehension of her mother's features. For a moment both mother and daughter stare fascinated as the yellow, grey, orange fur of the cat slowly darkens to a dirty red. Then Cecily looks up to see her mother's gaze fixed on her own, her mouth open, teeth bared in an expression of horror.

"It didn't work," Cecily whispered hoarsely. "I thought if she were dead, she wouldn't have to know that I went off and left her—she wouldn't have to think that I didn't love her anymore. So I made her close her eyes, and I stuck in the knife fast, but it still hurt her, and she looked at me, and she didn't die right away like I thought she would. I had to stick it in again, and she knew I did it! Don't you see! She felt it, she knew I did it! She thought I wanted to kill her. Oh, mother, she thought it!"

When her mother moves forward, Cecily dodges away. "Mother," she screams, trying to shatter the blankness of that face, trying to make it feel her pain. "She felt it, she knew! She thought . . ." Cecily struggles but she can't again speak the unbearable words, and so she whirls and runs down the hill, down to the beach and over the sand through the shore brush. Wet sounds rise like hiccups from her chest in time to the pounding of her heels on the sand. When she sees that she is not being followed, she flings herself down, gives in to the painful spasms that finally control her body and jerk animal-like moans from far behind her throat, until at last she becomes aware, on a different level, of her noise and her breathing as separate things, a distance that brings a kind of comfort. It reminds her of when, at seven years old, she had (knowing what was death, then, in bitterness of first realizations) dropped the stiff kittens shriveled and colorless like small rats, one

by one into the garbage can in full view of their mother (another cat, another place) making her watch, making her sniff the bodies before letting them fall—then had taken the mother cat under the covers with her, crying, trying to hold and comfort her there, until, deserted and horrified by the cat's calm unconcern, she had cried alone for the kittens with a child's and a mother's grief at death (having taken on, then, with bitterness and disillusion what she thought the animals should have been) but in the end listening to her own grief she knew then, as she knows now that her tears are for the hazy, undefined realization that the burning love which so often seems to fill her body until its pressure becomes pain if singularly, mysteriously, only her own. Is not, cannot, then be satisfied or reciprocated. Will always be there in the depths of her being, a secret gaping wound forever bleeding. And always must she walk straight and hard.

IN THE MORNING Cecily sits alone on the pier. She is not surprised that her mother doesn't understand why she killed Mama Kitty. What confuses her slightly is how her mother had cried, a soft sound that had contained no accusation, while helping Cecily in her extreme exhaustion to bed last night, and how her mother kept looking at her in that strange way, eyes dark and wide. But Cecily hasn't the time to spend thinking about that. There is only this one morning left to sit on the end of the pier and look into the bay, and she doesn't know if she will ever be happy again, away from that tempting world. Cecily sees her face, transformed somehow, soft and ethereal in the greenish liquid, eyes glistening with compassion. The corners of her lips lift lightly in a secret smile as she watches the girl in the water open her arms and reach up toward her in a gesture that is at once comforting, and accepting, and beckoning.

Vietnam Poems

RON CARTER

MISSION Off the Vietnam Coast, 1966

Forty days we lay still on the water,
cannon aimed at the beach
and shells bursting white
on the green hillside.

Ashore, the dead were counted
while we listened to music at night
or watched a flick
or prayed sometimes, some of us.

And we tried
hard
we tried
not to bitch about dehydrated potatoes
because war is hell
—like the man says—
really hell.

On the beach a Marine calls our shots
and sometimes curses, sometimes cries
until, on the night watch, unwatched
I hear him still, chorused by redemptive fire.

What war is this that makes traitors of us all?
Ourselves the enemy, I pray for balm:
“Lord, let them shoot. And call their shots.”

THE PILOT

We lifted him dead from the water,
Dead from his mission.
Dead.

And the sea water poured
Out of his mouth,
Seaweed twined in his hair,
And sea snakes flashed around him.

We stretched him dead on the deck
—snapped photographs—
The sea had swollen his flesh
In the orange flight suit
Until he was like a gas balloon
Ready to dance away in the wind.

We laid him dead
In the deepest part of the ship,
And the sea salt wrinkled his flesh,
Like an empty cradle.

TO KINGMAN : KILLED IN A TYPHOON IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

June, 1966

I pressed my mouth to yours
And tried to fill you with air like a balloon.
Your starched dungaree shirt pressed
Against my naked chest. Your
Rough lips yielded to mine
And I held your head in my hands

As though you were a woman gently
My breath. But you kept it, to give me back
And I didn't ask you to return it.
All I asked was for you to have again
Your two hundred days to go,
Your ticket from a Taiwan whore,
Your last cruise, your last cruise.
I covered your face with your white hat.

VIETNAM DREAM

Sometimes still in my deepest sleep
Someone orders "Turn" And we turn,
The ship swinging lazily around like a great log
Caught in a rippling current And
The guns point to something I cannot see.

Then someone orders "Fire" and we fire,
The first shell spinning out of the barrel
And arcing like a football thrown for a gain.
Where it touches the earth
The smoke puffs like popcorn.

And then all is still.
I have been ready now for years,
Waiting the order that never came,
The sneer of cold command,
The Jews lined up at the bathhouse door.

And all is still.
I cannot see beyond that moment
Whether striking my head I turn
Then or whether when someone orders
"Kill" I kill.

Hilda Halfheart's Notes to the Milkman

RUTH MOON KEMPHER

#13

(after reading Matthew Arnold's
"Scholar Gypsy" last night) I paused
 & thought
 a long time of augers & omens because
it's been a long time since I saw
even a chicken's claws
but when Dido wanted to know what Aeneas was
 thinking of, she had her conjurer pour out
 some chicken's entrails. No doubt
if you knew gut reading, you could tell
was he going home, to the local tavern, or to Hell
 but ¿what could it mean?
 when reading
 inner parts
 that the machine
that packed my dinner chicken packed two hearts?

#26

(A Problem in Continuity: ¿Of
the following, which is the beast?
a. Grendel b. Gondal c. Bede d. Yeats e. Geats
 or f. none of
the above.)
Scratch c. Bede, the Venerable Anglo-Saxon
 although he lived in a beastly monastery too
contemporaneously with Beowulf, who
had prowess, the strength of 30 in his hands
 (but isn't on the list) in old & hoary Hrothgar's land
and later became King of the Geats (e.) a social clan
which Gondal (b.) seems somewhat reminiscent of
 an imaginary nation, anti-Angrian creation—
(d.) Yeats a throwaway, though he too held some wild
 beliefs
climbing his tower stairs to watch the gyring of the stars
but one of ours.
all I know I know
is, under the bridge there lurks a troll
 who croaks a lonely, noisome song
Gondal, Grendel, all night long.

A Fine and Dandy Breakaway

MICHAEL KOCH

IF IT HAD NOT BEEN March 17th, a day for bizarre undertakings even by the prevailing standards of Mickey O'Shea's Tavern—one of the few days of the year Mickey drank in his own place, felt genuinely vulnerable, and encouraged his already lax and cheerfully rude employees to execute crippling authority over the customers; if Eddie Morton, the waiter, after months of nipping at the blackberry brandy, had not seen the Headless Indian dancing in the cellar (a Colonial legend which had given the name Indian's Head Tavern to the establishment Mickey's grandfather bought in 1902) and opted for an extended stay at the Eagleville Rehabilitation Center, leaving a lucrative section of tables unattended; if Mary-Ellen Thomas, the beautiful, serene housekeeper at St. Martin's rectory had not asked her son to take her to dinner, having had, as she always had each Spring, intimations of the youth which had abruptly left her the day her young husband died in Korea; if it had not been St. Patrick's Day, 1970, Stephen Thomas would never have found work at Mickey O'Shea's.

Oh he looked all right. At least his hair was short—no small consideration since the Black Panthers had begun raising hell in the neighborhood and the low-income high-rise had gone up around the corner. Despite his affection for the beautiful Mary-Ellen who, Mickey said, as he led them through the mass of “phony Irishmen,” he never saw enough of, O'Shea did not like kids in surplus army jackets, not since the hippies had begun infiltrating Rafferty's Bar and Grill, the saloon where Mickey did *his* drinking. It did not occur to Mickey O'Shea, moving as always straight from his heart to a conclusion, that the army jacket was not surplus. Although the blond, lanky boy was unusually tan for the time of year.

“I hear,” Mary-Ellen said as she slipped past Mickey into the booth he had commandeered, “Eddie Morton is taking the cure.”

There was a whoop at a table by the front door. Mickey O'Shea, myopic and well into a fifth of scotch, did not flinch when he turned and saw what appeared to be a giant string bean doing a jig on the table.

"My Stephen here needs a job."

The boy's protest went to a smile over a broken front tooth. Hadn't his father been a soldier, hell, a hero in Korea? "Come see me tomorrow," Mickey growled and went after the string bean.

AND STEPHEN THOMAS would have been just another in the parade of young men marking time in Mickey's employ while waiting for something if two weeks after he was hired he had not been in Rafferty's Bar and Grill the night Margaret O'Shea limped in and caught Mickey with another woman.

Stephen had come out of the men's room to find Margaret in front of him, her face scotch-red, shoulders bunched, the cane she sometimes carried for her "cranky" hip jammed in one white fist. Across the narrow room Mickey stood as was his habit, both great hands on the bar, back straight, his head tipped forward so he seemed to be talking under his arm to the blonde to his right. The brilliance of the moment paralyzed Stephen: the possibilities laid out like a Late Late movie. Then he saw the cane again turning slow circles as Margaret raised it, cocked, beside her right ear.

He breached the tight space between Mickey and the girl, put his arm about her, kissed her, and ordered a round from Rafferty. The girl giggled; Mickey peered at Stephen from behind two days of pretty steady drinking. And right then is when Rafferty said, "Hello Margaret," and Mickey's soul came up out of his body for a look around.

The blonde was introduced to Margaret as Stephen's fiancée, whereupon a relief settled like religion on the five of them. They stood grinning at one another until Rafferty, perhaps as an offering to whatever saint protects saloon keepers, set up a round of drinks.

As he was being led out, chillingly sober, Mickey shook Stephen's hand and said to Rafferty, "It's moments like this make me proud to be an American."

Rafferty told the story to Witherspoon and he told everyone. By the next afternoon Mickey O'Shea's bar was lined with the boys, most of whom had worn one of Mickey's jokes like a cocked hat for months just waiting for a chance.

"A man doesn't like another man to kiss the girl he's hustling," Nash said, "but sometimes it's necessary." Hawkins allowed as how "A man will go to any extremes to get his wife to notice him." The pace was breathless. All afternoon Stephen was called over to settle some fine point: "Just exactly what color were Mic's eyes?" while Mickey swore and dropped glasses behind the bar. Irwin left his trolley car parked out on Germantown Avenue, burst in the front door, screamed down the bar, "I heard a story this morning made me proud to be an American," and left.

FOR STEPHEN THOMAS a part of America had passed while he practiced typing in high school (*Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country*) over and over as the loudspeakers crackled, corrected and recorrected, and discovered John Kennedy dead; all the while a mad priest stalked the corridors outside screaming gibberish about Alice in Wonderland and the Red Chinese. Murders, assassinations followed; then Viet Nam. Stephen had spent a year in Viet Nam and not once heard the phrase which had boomed like the voice of God through Mickey's pickled brain that night in Rafferty's. The word "duty" served well where pride would not. For most of them it had not even been duty; to go to Nam with the boys was the easier thing to do, easier than Canada, than taking their lives into their very own hands and standing still.

So after his whole short life, after Viet Nam, he had arrived at Mickey O'Shea's Tavern and was surprised to find America waiting. George Washington glowered among the muskets and campaign maps behind the bar; Mickey, ignoring any distinction between his Washington and the original, would tell how it was painted by Gilbert Stuart "in a barn down the Avenue a piece." As Stephen hurried about his work America winked at him in the tricky light which fell on etchings and aquatints of the Battle of Germantown: Assault On Chew House, Skirmish At Market Square, Flight! He stumbled amid the liquor stocks in the cellar in the same dark that had comforted a band of patriots separated from Mad Anthony Wayne's command and fleeing the advance of a redcoat named Agnew. Washington had been chased past the front door of Mickey O'Shea's (The Indian's Head in those days) by General Agnew in a kind of adagio after the Battle of Germantown. Agnew rode up the Avenue to his death, ambushed by a party of citizens at the Mennonite Meeting House; Hans P. Boyer, a civilian, boasted

that he had aimed for the star on the General's chest (Boyer took to drink and died in the poor house). And Washington kept going out of Chestnut Hill through Flourtown to make a stand at such an obscure cluster of hills near Whitemarsh that they became known ever after as Fort Washington, and thence, when Howe failed to pursue his advantage, to winter at Valley Forge.

Somehow in the plain logic that dogged Mickey as relentlessly as his wife and her cane, the dance Washington had performed before the door enabled four generations of Americans to come home from four wars and take their rightful spots at the bar before three generations of O'Sheas. When pressed by drink or a concept too elaborate for him, Mickey would deliver himself: "Our country was born in the streets out there and we in here aren't ever going to forget it while I draw breath . . ." a predictable performance that could go on and on as endless as the continent itself.

STEPHEN WAS INVITED to The Willows, an after-hours club, where in the sheen of a noxious concoction known as a "Stinger" he made the slip which gave him a nickname. At Mickey O'Shea's the giving of a nickname was a ceremony not unlike Confirmation. The name was a key to some monumentally unpleasant incident or some part of oneself the confirmee would normally wish private—therein the slap. Shorty Wither-spoon, Bubbles Nash, Gargole Hawkins, Wrong Way Irwin—names innocent in themselves but each honed to a terrible edge by the years, weaving of tales, and the inevitable raising of the dead.

Eight had come, all Mickey's pals, but by 4:00 A.M. age, common sense, or the infatuations alcohol occasionally produces, had scattered the rest, leaving Mickey and Stephen. On the table between them like votive lights, offerings from saloon keepers and other night riders, stood six stingers, holding honey-brown at their centers the glow of the indirect lighting. A broken down rock and roll band was wandering through "Sympathy For The Devil" while a soft wind poked into the smokey room bearing the deep peat perfume of the leafmeal about the stand of weeping willows outside.

"My grandfather," Mickey said, his breath a mist of mint from the drinks, "was'a wonderful man . . . story teller . . . always tellin' me about the Indian with no head lived in the cellar . . . how they were pals. Walking to school one day . . . November, 1935, coldest winter I remember. I'm going past

the saloon, here's these shakers . . . guys need couple'a shots before work . . . bangin' on the front door. Go over. Look through the window. Old kind of glass . . . wavey, ya know. See my grandfather standin' behind the bar. Bang couple times . . . he don't turn. Go round back. Grandmom had little garden behind the saloon. Get the spare key under the Saint Francis. Click. Go in the back.

Whole place is cold . . . quiet. Stand there cause I know right away he's dead and I know he's standin up . . . didn't wanta see a dead man standin up . . . not one I know. Far way like drums I hear this BOOM BOOM BOOM which is the shakers poundin' on the window but me I'm half crazy and thinkin it's that damn Indian dancin' around in the cellar. Finally I go out through the kitchen . . . there he is deader'n hell. A stroke. Only he falls backwards and his jacket catches on the fancy woodwork behind the bar which keeps him up. Take him down . . . cover 'im with the table cloth so those shakers don't see him. Lock the back door. Go home."

A service door was set ajar in the hall. A draft, a sigh, and a curtain flapped by Stephen's head, a pathetic hand waving good-bye to the twilight, settling at length on his right shoulder. He felt a panic: the gray light of morning was leaking in everywhere, windows and doors, dissipating the glow of the liquor. He turned to Mickey but he was lost, staring into the sweet pool of his drink. It was Stephen's turn.

There were any number of tales of bloody men, unicorns, gamblers and stars Stephen could have told Mickey but he reached for the story that was dearest to him, a dream cloth to cover the growing light of day.

"You see Mickey," he said, "I'm a writer . . ."

Mickey came back unsteadily from the frozen November of 1935. "You're righter? Righter'n who?"

"No. It's what I want to be . . . a writer."

His face scrunched in an enormous wink, the trope of Irish humor, Mickey trained one ravaged red eye on Stephen. "Go on," he said.

Stephen did. It was the kind of mistake a person only makes once.

He was confirmed the following afternoon in front of all the boys: "Well, Dylan, what'll it be?" Mickey owed Stephen one for having saved his life at the expense of his dignity.

"Mickey, I'm not a poet." But that distinction did not register. Mickey had a reverence for words, the rhythm, the music—the sense was unimportant. But it was a reverence none the less. On certain still mornings as they waited for the lunch trade

Mickey would learn over his coffee careful as a father, "How's the writing coming, Dylan?"

"Slow Mickey, slow as hell."

STEPHEN BOUGHT a motorcycle and took an apartment over a garage in Chestnut Hill behind a notorious stone mansion in the vast gardens of which each afternoon an overbred beauty spread her Vassar towel across a redwood chaise to sun herself.

The dim apartment had belonged in better days to the family chauffeur and so had been appointed with elegant cast-offs. A cracked violin rested on a shelf in the closet, a World War I infantryman's uniform lay neatly in the corner of a cedar chest, the maple bed had a lace canopy, and the oak table which consumed the tiny kitchen made a fine desk under the bedroom windows.

In the early morning he would write while the squirrels ran in the walls and sparrows poked under the eaves. He felt blessed; he had returned intact, as far as he knew, from the strange adventure of war to this secret place, to this comfortable, declining neighborhood where the very trees seemed to have sensed a steady erosion of wealth and out of respect succumbed to a dry rot; the ground was littered with splintered branches after a wind, the illusion, to look down the street askance, was of a cake melting. His mind was clear. He stood at the very beginning of the sweet mystery that was his life; others had started just this way with nothing and gone to dizzy heights, doors had opened inside of him, it was possible he could follow.

Stephen's older brother had taken like a turnip to a commune in California; his father was dead, a photograph in a plain frame; his mother had retreated into the Church, into a life circumscribed by feast days, the sacraments, and the idiosyncrasies of four priests. Stephen was restive, with an eye for an open road. He was solitary, a position of advantage he thought which might allow him to view unimpeded what there was to view.

So he was not surprised, indeed he thought it an omen, that summer afternoon he came home early from the Tavern and spotted the Vassar girl, nude, wearing only a pink day-glo crash helmet and a tiny American flag riding a unicycle down the flagstone paths of the gardens. America, that part Mickey O'Shea did not look to, the strange future, seemed available to Stephen if he would watch and listen and remember.

EACH SUMMER in the middle of June Mickey O'Shea's life came full circle to the time he had been nineteen and a bum. It was in June that Margaret opened the house in Beach Haven, all that remained beside an assortment of cousins and second cousins of the considerable glory that had been her family. She had come out of a tiny girl's academy on Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia. A place where needlepoint was taught, a fountain pattered in the courtyard and a rare order of nun stepped in the marble halls. She had been a debutante at eighteen and at twenty seen her father swindled out of his stained glass business—an event which killed her mother and drove the old man to bed. Then at twenty-two just as she had begun to assume certain mannerisms of her maiden aunt, just as the whole wide world seemed more and more to radiate from the house set carefully in the dunes at Beach Haven: the bay-berry, beach plum, the wind-shaped Japanese pine and rhododendron of the garden, the still cypress-paneled library, the dank stairs and platform of the widow's walk where a telescope stood on a tripod—Margaret allowed herself to be wooed and fondled, won, by a sun-browned Irishman from unfashionable Ship Bottom.

She had met him on the beach and that same fine clear summer evening walked five blocks to meet him again in front of the pharmacy where he waited with his motorcycle. He drove her to Barnegat Light, they strolled the cool sand before the lighthouse. He held her hand and the sun set in a splash of pink and orange which (she said) was just the way her heart had fallen for him. When they returned it was twilight. The aunt was upstairs reading *Twelfth Night* to Margaret's father. It was 1937 and the veranda creaked as they clutched in the shadows. They married that October.

In the summers the O'Sheas regained part of what they had surrendered to each other thirty-three years before. For Mickey this particular summer came complete with a motorcycle. He was not fool enough to try it alone but he'd sit behind Stephen, wearing an orange helmet, and shout out the landmarks they passed as they roared down the cobblestone streets. To the cops on patrol in the 14th District, Mickey O'Shea on a motorcycle was a wonderful distraction from the knifings, racism, and accelerating drug traffic in Germantown.

THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN began the day Margaret left for Beach Haven. That afternoon Bubbles Nash appeared with a melodica he had bought sight unseen for his son. Upon

close inspection, after downing two of Mickey's lopsided martinis, he declared it unplayable; as proof he produced a myriad combination of shattering unsympathetic notes which caused Mickey to curse, warn, threaten and so to confiscate the instrument.

The ways to Mickey's temper were few and well known. One did not degrade America or the quality of the bar liquor in Mickey's presence. But here was something new. "Mickey," Bubbles said, "does not like music." The word spread, as secretly, as silently as electricity, around the bar, around. Mickey felt it coming; his offer to return the melodica was refused out of hand.

Wrong Way Irwin appeared the next afternoon with a trombone and commenced an interminable improvisation on "The Beer Barrel Polka." Washington's stay at Valley Forge had served Mickey all his life as an example of what could be had by tenacity; he dug in. By week's end he had collected a trombone, bass drum, fiddle, bassoon, clarinet, trumpet, a bizarre Polish harmonica, and an upright piano delivered with professional dispatch while Mickey ate lunch in the back kitchen.

Mickey suffered in silence though he did cast long, undulating black looks down the bar and allow as how one day he would be pushed too far and a lot of people would be sorry.

On the third of July, all the boys—Witherspoon, Nash, Hawkins, Irwin and Rafferty—appeared at the top of the lunch hour dressed as Revolutionary British soldiers. They expected Mickey to go off and he did. What they did not expect, what no one expected, was the .38 Police Special which Mickey produced from under the bar: "This is it, you sons of bitches," his voice roared and rolled on the precise gathering barks of the pistol; the reverberation in the long narrow room rattled bones, the illusion of the dull slap of bullets was horrifying; glasses, mugs, plates, hamburgers, salads, hats, briefcases, and roasted stuffed halves of spring chicken (the luncheon special) took off like animation hung in the air while Mickey screamed, "You've gone and pushed a good man too far!" and the various owners of those articles fumbled and sucked at the floor as if it were heaven and they were blind.

When that berserk rain had fallen, in an awful silence, Mickey produced a bowler hat and a cane and tap-danced at a hazardous angle out from behind the bar and through the kitchen door. It was, he told Stephen later, ". . . the topper, what my old vaudevillian uncle would call the fine and dandy breakaway."

There were no heart attacks. A certain confusion prevailed among the regulars and outrage among the tourists (a tourist was anyone who was not a regular; they were told to go elsewhere if they did not like it). The boys, pale as welts in their red costumes, regrouped and retreated to Rafferty's. The gun had been loaded with blanks.

Mickey was the commander in chief, but he had taught the boys well. So when he goes for his car one evening he finds in the parking space a rectangle of metal the size of a coffee table weighing several thousand pounds. A bumper is discernible etched through the mass with the precision of surrealism. A neatly typed note and his license plate sit on top. It is a blanched Mickey O'Shea who returns and downs four fingers of scotch before passing the elegant note around: *You're Next*, it says. The boys each have a course of action to present, so it is some time before Mickey calls the police and leads them through the kitchen out the back door into the parking lot. Hawkins has had plenty of time to tow the squashed car away and return Mickey's Cadillac to its space.

The summer campaign pressed on into August, a succession of dazzling maneuvers. Mickey was in the process of exhausting his friends. He would drag them from saloon to saloon, attaching and losing people as he went, until daybreak when his staunchest followers would desert him in the parking lot of The Willows. Then he would seek out Stephen who was up each morning at the oak desk under his bedroom window.

Increasingly in the still thick air of August the words would not come to Stephen. By chance he had been drawn into an eddy, old money and burlesque. He had been held fascinated but not sustained. There was talk of revolution in California. Banks were being burnt. The L. A. County Sheriffs were brought into a college town in dump trucks. Cannibals were discovered hitchhiking on the Coast road. The remnants of the flower children were fleeing into the mountains. Stephen was distracted; it would be convenient to be gone, and in part he was. He would sit in his apartment or the gazebo behind the swimming pool listening to the puck and pang of tennis, a metronome of wealth which commenced at first light from the Cricket Club two blocks away, measuring each soft rustle of the mimosa, each minute turn of air, as if he might chart a course, get into the wind.

“WHEN I DIE my place will be closed and sold. I've arranged it like that.”

The mansion was empty in August, the many bright

inhabitants off to some island in the Atlantic. The antique clocks wound down, stopped, collected a fine dust on the mantles. The chestnut trees rattled and splintered in thunder storms littering the grounds and drives. Mickey and Stephen strolled the ambulatories and porches peering into the drawing room where dark oils hung in gilt frames and Victorian furniture sat draped. They walked the flagstone paths of the gardens and Mickey set up headquarters in the gazebo they discovered behind the swimming pool.

Stephen found him asleep on the chaise that morning clutching precisely perpendicular a can of beer. He awoke possessed and turned point-blank as if continuing a conversation begun long ago, "When I die my place will be closed and sold. I've arranged it like that." He got up and drained his beer. "Come on, Dylan. Let's get coffee. I want to show you something."

They took the motorcycle and drove into Germantown, the bike dribbling on the cobblestones, the dull heat building and surrounding them. Mickey bought coffee, then directed Stephen down a maze of tiny streets and a dirt alley. They stopped beside a stone wall.

"It's only open on holidays." Mickey climbed onto the seat of the motorcycle then up onto the wall. "Have to get in this way." Stephen followed. It was a graveyard.

Patrick Michael O'Shea, 1939-1947, was buried under a small white marker; nearby, surrounded by a low brass railing were four thin gray gravestones, blank. A plaque on the railing read: *Here Lie Four Unknown Soldiers Killed In The War Of Independence October 4th 1777.*

"My boy was one of the last buried here. Had to pull some strings. Wanted him here near these heroes."

Stephen braced for some screeching sentiment but it did not come.

"There's no one to carry on you see, that's why they're to sell the place when I go" Mickey looked out across the graveyard towards Germantown Avenue where an ancient pocked church stood barred and boarded behind the encircling wall. "You're lucky to be a poet, Dylan."

They walked back to the wall, drank the coffee, and Stephen tried to explain once more that he was not a poet but Mickey was off, stepping brightly through the graveyard, delivering detailed obituaries on the inhabitants. "Old Shadrach there is a mean son of a bitch. Took four bullets trying to storm Chew House, morning of October 4th, 1777."

They roared over to the Tavern where they found Rafferty

and Eddie Morton, just down from Eagleville, on a toot. Bill Mahoney, the day bartender, groaned when Mickey ordered up a round; it was 9 A.M. and already a long day. An argument ensued as to the authenticity of the Headless Indian. Mickey angrily adjourned the discussion to the cellar.

Stephen took his beer out to the front stoop.

It is said there was a fog upon the morning of the Battle of Germantown; the patriots mistook each other for the enemy and opened fire. Ammunition ran low. Mad Anthony Wayne's command collapsed and with it the left flank. Washington withdrew galloping madly through the smoke and confusion up Germantown Avenue, past Mickey O'Shea's, into the brilliant future.

There is a war whoop from deep in the cellar of the Tavern. The voice of Mickey O'Shea hardly diminished comes past Stephen, "Here chiefie, chiefie, chiefie, chiefie . . ." and carries on the still air up the winding Avenue, northwest, the way Washington went. Without moving, Stephen follows.

Haiku

P. W. GRAY

There is liver in
The icebox. All day, the cat
Has polished my leg.

For Andrew At Three Months

JOSEPH MEREDITH

My lumpiest dear, all florid globes of nose
and cheek and chin, lip and ear (but with eyes
that prick like a safety pin), a father tries
without success, to see which way the child goes

before it's born. In a dark mood bred
of too little sleep or too much Cutty Sark
he thinks, wasting an afternoon in the park,
"You'd bring a child to a world nearly dead?"

I meant no harm. Still, though you'd never fastened
eyes on me, nor, smiling, ever bent
your fist around my finger, I would have sent
you, all hope, whirling on a fool's errand.

An hour most poorly spent within sight
of dogwoods drenched in sun, each petal tipped
in pink, each cruciform bloom equipped
with the promise of flowers awash in light.

We all inherit death, Andrew, but not alone.
I give dogwoods in the sun to you, who cling like life to bone.

My Grandmother's Wake

DAN RODDEN

Every ethnic group has brought to America its own customs, symbols, and mythology, thus enriching the cultural pluralism (as the sociologist would say) or adding garlic, soy sauce, kielbasi and potatoes to the melting pot (as I would say). The Germans gave us *lieder* and *liederkrantz*, the Italians opera and pizza, and the Irish, God love them, gave us the Irish wake.

The stereotype of the Irish American as fun-loving drinker must yield to the deeper and truer revelations of Irish-American writers: it is not liquor the Irish love, it is death. Observe the banshee wails of such writers as O'Neill, O'Hara, and Fitzgerald. Whether it was the tragedy of the untragic, the last days of Julian English, or the last hours of Jimmy Gatz, each had a bitter taste in his mouth. O'Hara's phrase says it best: all of them had appointments in Samarra.

Those who could not celebrate death in novels or poems were still wont to sit upon the ground (generally in somebody's kitchen), and "For God's sake, tell sad stories of the death of kings." If in Ireland, every man was a king, he was never more so than at the hour of his death, so the occasion for many of these kitchen meetings was the "wake," the viewing of the corporeal remains of "a buddy of mine." The wake becomes perhaps the central Irish symbol, and no wake could be complete without another Irish-American institution, "the Boys." (The Boys might be of any age from twenty-five to seventy and even upwards; they had this in common: they always "turned out" for the wake, normally held at "his residence." The "he" in "his" generally referred to the deceased; "she" was the bereaved survivor, insurance tables strongly indicate.

The Boys would enter the residence quietly; they were apt to come early. First, they would sign the memorial book which testified to their presence. Then they would form in line with the other neighbors and exchange expressions of appropriate feeling with the bereaved. These generally took the precise

form at least in the neighborhoods with which I was familiar: "I'm sorry for your loss, Teresa," to which she knew she must, perforce, reply, "I know you are, John." "I'm sorry for your loss." "I know you are." "I'm sorry for your loss." "I know you are." The repeated colloquy tended to assume the form and structure of a litany.

Thence to the casket, where the mourner would kneel and say a brief prayer; out of the corner of his eye, he who had sent flowers would check to ascertain if his floral offering was displayed as prominently as its cost justified. While the neighborhood ladies arranged themselves on undertaker's chairs, The Boys sank toward the kitchen, like fish back into water. In the kitchen the lads would take a drop or two (not of water) to ease their loss and warm their memories of the dear departed. They'd emerge only briefly when someone—usually one of the neighbor ladies—would come to the kitchen door, and announce importantly, "Father's about to say the rosary." Whereupon they'd shuffle back into the parlor, and mechanically voice their Aves. The wise priest limited himself to a single decade of the rosary, and the very briefest of tributes to the departed.

THE FUNCTIONAL part of the evening completed, the Boys would return to the kitchen until nine o'clock, when they would take their leave, and adjourn to "the local," there to discuss the merits and, as the evening wore on, perhaps recall some of the excesses and less attractive characteristics of their recently deceased friend.

A dear friend of mine, she that was Jeanmarie Dunn (till she married Mickey Coogan's boy, Joseph Patrick), had a rather disquieting experience while facing the receiving line. She had, as we Irish say, "lost her mother"; Mrs. Dunn's death was generally considered to be "a blessing"; she had suffered great pain in the last months of her life.

The litany was in process: "Sorry for your loss, Jeanmarie." "I know you are." "Sorry for your loss." "I know you are." Suddenly, there came an interruption. Jeanmarie was already well into her "I know you are," when she became aware that there had been a violation, a departure from the poetic rhythm; under the circumstances, a most inappropriate one at that. A neighborhood lady with a flair for the original, and the desire to make her own contribution, if nothing else, a metrical variation, had said (the startled Jeanmarie realized), "Well, Jeanmarie—easy come, easy go."

OH, YES, FINALLY—My Grandmother's Wake. Elucidation is needed: Grandma VanHorn was neither Irish, within the context we have been evoking, nor was she, in fact, my grandmother. She was the grandmother of three of my cousins, whose father had married "outside the Faith." But since none of the rest of us *had* grandparents, (my own, of the clans Rodden, Walsh, Connell, and McAdams, had all died before my birth), we all shared the only grandparent around; she was Grandma Van Horn to all of us. (She was a rather testy old lady who looked like, and had all the vivacity of, Whistler's mother—but that's neither here nor there.)

Although not one of "us," she was given an inappropriate Irish wake held in the large parlor of my Uncle Will's house. In attendance were mostly the Irish side of the family, and their friends. I have the feeling that she'd have given one of those combination snorts and sniffles with which she was wont to punctuate her none-too-colorful conversation. Anyway, the evening was one of the memorable experiences of my youth.

The undertaker was, as he always was for such family occasions, my cousin Charlie. He was not a man of exquisite taste. The incident of which I speak concerns the conflict (of which he was quite unaware) he had with my Aunt Nan, God rest them both. My aunt was a maiden lady, on "our side of the family"; Aunt Nan was a great lady of perfect taste.

Charlie Dillon, the undertaker in question, had come upon a new pride and joy, which he introduced that evening and placed above the casket. It was a crucifix, with small electric light bulbs in the hands and feet of the Christus, where the nails would have been.

This so offended the sensibilities of my aunt that she instructed me—I was seven years old at the time—to crawl under the casket and pull the plug. I did. Such was my regard for my aunt that if she'd told me to swim the Hellespont, I'd have given *that* a try.

When Dillon returned from the kitchen, where he had been serving as libation bearer, he stared at the crucifix, perplexed. Then, deciding that something had probably gone wrong with the electricity, he took his turn in crawling under the casket; he replugged the lights. When he went back to his levee in the kitchen, my aunt redirected me to pull the plug. I did. Eventually Dillon returned; staring unbelievably at the lights, he rather indignantly crawled under the casket again, and again replugged the lights. He crawled back, looked suspiciously at everyone (except me; no fool I, I was out on the porch.) I looked through

the front doorway and saw him stalk angrily back to his durbar. I came into the room, whereupon my aunt—well, you know!

I SPENT THE ENTIRE wake crawling under the casket. Actually, it is a favorite memory, it was my favorite Irish wake, and—I think—my favorite Irish-American symbol. So let the Germans have their band concerts, the Italians their family parties, and the Poles their polkas. We Irish have wakes!

Ancient History

M. L. HESTER, JR.

There were days when it was enough
Just to breathe, and to be surrounded
By other breathers. Breath was life,
And life was abundant, and it was enough.
It was enough to watch the sway
Of a girl's buttocks as she walked (even though
It was usually away from you), or smell
The professor's tarry old pipe as he passed,
Or throw a discreet snowball at the statue
Of the founder (Spring he was always painted red)
These were passing proofs that one
Indeed was alive, and only the founder was dead.
And one did not have to wish
For statues to be constructed in one's image,
Or buildings raised in one's name,
Or babies christened in one's honor.
No. It was more pleasant to be part
Of the scuffle of feet as classes let out,
And to wander about with one's mind disengaged
Until the next meal, the next cigarette.
Basically one would remain the same,
Along with the others, until graduation,
When in black robes everyone would scatter,
The eulogy read, to find
Their own private places to die.

The Harrowing

T. ALAN BROUGHTON

IT WAS THE EVENING of the second day. He should have been sleeping, but Jonathan could hear his parents arguing in the next room because the door was only partly closed. He could tell by their tone of voice that they were saying things he did not want to hear, so he stood in the dark, dressed in his pajamas, by the square of the open balcony door. He did not go all the way out. It made him dizzy to stand any closer to the edge. Even standing where he was, looking from three stories down to the street lamps, the lighted wharves and water of the bay glistening like oil, he had to grip one of the curtains. There was enough traffic, enough music from the restaurants and voices or laughter to cover up all but the tones of arguing, the wordless polyphony of their anger.

If he half-closed his eyes he could see, beyond the sickle of lights along the bay's shore, the imperfect cone of Vesuvius in the moonlight. On clear days there were sometimes small wisps of smoke, ominous and fascinating to Jon whose parents had told him it would never erupt again and that it was too old now, getting cold. He imagined the dragon that lived deep inside was sick and dying and that it warmed its bones on the last heat of its cindered belly. But secretly Jon was not at all sure. Things had a way of being deceptive, especially dragons. They let you think they were finished and suddenly when you least expected it, they pounced. The worst things always happened quickly, like arguments lashing out when everyone seemed happy. Jon said he believed his parents, but he kept his eye on the mountain whenever he could, which was most of the time. Wherever they went they seemed to be able to see it.

Except at Cumae. They went to Cumae on the first day. There, for a while, he lost sight of it. But Jon did not feel any safer. They stopped at Solfitara where the stench of sulphur made it hard to breathe and the earth could be seen boiling and bubbling in little pits. If solid earth and rock could do that in

an open field, then it meant that a volcano had its roots everywhere. Even at Cumae, where the ground seemed mostly hard and dead, the dragon was lashing his tail under them. The trees were stooped, writhing and choked with vines. Through them he could see the glare of sun on the sea and the island they called Ischia lying on the haze like a black, far-off thunder head.

He did not want to go, but he let his father lead him down into the long tunnel of the cave where bars of iron were shoring up the blocks of porous stone. Openings looked out on a blank sky and over their edges drooped layers of dead roots. His father recited some Latin to him and lit his pipe. The air was damp and the sound of his father's voice was deepened, echoing so that the movements of his lips and the sounds seemed out of phase. He could not understand the words anyway. When his mother joined them she complained of the smell.

"I don't see why we had to come here anyway," she said.

When they picked up the old argument Jon went out and sat in the field. But wherever he went he could hear their voices. He tried not to pay any attention. He watched the old woman dressed in tattered black as she worked her way slowly up through the trees, stooping now and then to pick up sticks, putting them carefully in the sling she carried over her shoulder. He thought of going to the car but did not want to walk alone past the old woman and through the trees. She was a walking withered tree herself, the kind that grasps you brittlely around the throat and tucks you into her bark. He could hear his mother crying. The sounds of his parents were like claws making dry scratchings.

He put his hands over his ears. He even had to close his eyes because without sound the woman seemed to float and waver up through the shadows. That left him in the dark and very frightened. He imagined that he was still in the corridor of the cave and it had tilted away from the light, sending him plummeting into a pit with no bottom.

When they came out, his father made Jon and his mother stand by the mouth of the cave while he took a photograph. His mother put one hand on his shoulder. It trembled unless she clutched very tightly. On the way down they stopped by the old woman while his father tried to ask her some questions.

"Where is the little museum, do you know?" he said in broken Italian.

She had no teeth. Her face was cracked and brown and she seemed unable to stand straight.

"Ah, ah, ah," she said with her mouth open. One of her

eyes was bluish and frosted. Then she laughed, shaking the stick at them.

His father tried again.

"Oh, Joe, can't you see she's cracked?"

They went away and left her and when Jon looked back over his shoulder she was bent in their direction, mutely snatching toward them with her withered arms. They never found the museum. In the first town they passed through they had to wait while an ambulance came and took away the body of an old man who had been struck by a passing car. Someone had put an overcoat on his body so that only his worn shoes were showing. His parents tried to make Jon look at something else, but he could not. The driver who had hit the old man was crying and sometimes he waved his hands and wrung them in the air. No one seemed to be listening to him. It was only the shoes that made it look like a body. Jon wondered how anyone could curl up so small. When they lifted him onto the stretcher, his head fell back and his arms suddenly spread out like the wings of a bird. There was dark liquid all over the cobblestones.

When his mother tucked him into bed that night he reminded her of the promise.

"Not tomorrow," she said. "Tomorrow we are going to Pompeii."

"What's that?"

"That's a city, a very old city that was all covered over with dust and lava when Vesuvius erupted once."

Before he had seen it or thought much about volcanoes he had made them promise that they could climb the mountain. Now he was tempted to tell his mother he would rather not. But he had decided that would be cowardice. He was going to be brave, like watching when the iodine is put on a cut and not crying out. It made it hurt more, but you won after all. The dragon, he knew, was watching him as much as he was watching the mountain.

SO ON THE SECOND day they went to Pompeii. Jon had not been prepared for the shattered landscape they took him wandering through: the crumbled walls, the tilted and scoured paving stones, the mutilated statues set up in dumb poses on cracked pedestals, and over it all the mountain near and tall like the stump of a giant rotted tree trunk. They came suddenly on groups of tourists in the narrow streets, huddled and staring quietly to the voice of a guide; they walked hollowly into courtyards where fountains with dolphins rose like dried

mushrooms into the sunlight. Once a guide took him and his father aside to look at some pictures that had been covered with lattices. He opened the blinds and there were delicate paintings of men and women playing naked in a band around the wall. When he told his mother what he had seen she tried to be angry.

"Jonathan Sands, you forget what you saw in there."

He saw no reason to. Like everything else around them, the figures seemed dumb and paralyzed. It was as though people had never been there and the town had grown up from strange seeds to lie for centuries gradually and silently crumbling over the long roots of the mountain. Even the bodies were doubled up in poses of sleep, earthly impressions of flowers in human forms that had never uncurled. Jon knew the city was the dragon's wasteland, a fragment of his dreams. It was a shell, fragile, showing the imprints of bones but no longer containing anything but the vacant sunlit air.

On the way back they had to pause for a funeral cortege. Two black horses in silver furnishings pulled a black carriage with heavy, toppling scrolls, and windows showed the brassy coffin inside. The relatives walked behind and they supported an old woman who kept raising her head and keening—high, thin, methodical as the calling of a hawk.

After a while Jon heard the voices in the other room cease. A door slammed. His father would go out for a while now. He took one last look at the mountain, turned for a second in which he thought he heard it lean silently to snuff out the lights along the bay with a hiss, but they were still there when he turned back, yellow, soft compared to the sharp glitter of the stars. From his bed he heard his mother walking about from time to time in the other room and then even her light went out. In his dreams he rose to find a black box at the end of his bed placed there by two men who turned their backs on him, and when he opened it there was a body inside, malevolent, grinning, an ugly joke with its hands half-fleshed and pointing. He tried to make it rise and go away, and the top of the coffin would not shut. The men were gone. It was all a bad trick they were playing on him. He shook the body by the shoulder and the arm rolled loosely in its socket. "Get up," he said, "get up."

On the morning of the third day they all woke up late and it was not until after eleven that they started driving down along the coast. They stopped to eat a picnic lunch by the ocean before turning inland. It was oppressively hot. The ocean had a smooth, almost greasy look to it as it rolled in through the windless air. Some very high clouds expanded in front of the sun and seemed to serve like a blanket on top of the already

heated atmosphere. The only shade they could find was a narrow column formed by a gnarled thorn tree near the edge of the beach. His father ate standing up, staring out at the ocean as though waiting for something to come in. On a distant pile of rocks they could see from time to time a white flash of surf like a feather turned in the wind.

Jon looked once at the mountain and then faced away from it. In the morning he had been almost frantic. There were at least four or five times when he could have said no. He could even tell that his parents wanted to be released from their promise. His father must have come back very late. He seemed tired and when Jon had gone into their bedroom that morning he had been sitting on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands. They would talk to Jon but not to each other. It had been a long morning of silence. Jon was afraid to talk, afraid of what his frightened tongue might say. He clenched his fists so tightly that his nails left half-moons in his palm. He would not let the mountain win.

From the mountain a thin column of smoke rose straight up at the sky and then as though turning back on itself it flattened, hovering in a long, thin veil over the land. The silence in Jon's ears was as though he stood in an empty house.

"You must eat some lunch," his mother said and he tried.

They turned away from the sea and wound up the base of the mountain searching for a little town perched high on its shoulder. At first the land was green with vineyards or they drove through silvered groves of olive trees. But the higher they went the more the living things became stunted, until there was only the hard black lava like diseased skin and fields of cindered, hollow rocks. His father explained to him how the eruptions were destructive but that after a while the land became even more fertile than it had before.

"It's like the Nile," his father said.

Jon had studied the Nile that year in geography. But that did not help. Jon remembered the pictures taken just after the flood—of dead cows caked with mud, their legs sticking straight up, bellies bloated, and descriptions of the flies and of people wading through their houses, dying of thirst in the watery land.

The town, Costanza, had perched itself in the last pocket of green between two lava flows. There seemed to be hardly anyone there, partly because it was siesta time and the shutters of the houses were closed against the heat. They went to the Albergo Ascensione to look for a guide, which was what the hotel had told them to do. Jon and his mother waited in the

car. It was not a very clean looking inn. A thin, lamed dog was rooting about under the tables on the patio. When his father came back two men followed him partway and stopped before they reached the street. They stared at the car. Mr. Sands leaned in the window.

"They say they are the only guides available. They won't go alone. We'll have to take both of them."

The one nearest them, an emaciated man with violently disheveled hair as though patches of it had been almost torn out, grinned at them and held his grin until it became fixed and expressionless. His companion nodded his head at them and seemed to be unable to decide what to do with his hands.

"I don't like the way they look," his mother said.

Mr. Sands shrugged. "They're not very attractive."

"What if they just knock us over the head somewhere up there? Who would ever know?"

Jon watched the two men half turn away and the thin one was talking, glancing over at the car from time to time.

"Really, Louise, don't you think that's a little romantic?"

She laughed once without looking at him.

"I don't see anything very romantic about any of this, if you must know."

"I suppose then we'll call it all off."

"No," said Jon. His parents turned half to him and then glanced at each other.

"But Jon, dear," said his mother.

"No. You promised we could."

"He's right," said his father, just as Jon knew he would.

So it was done. The two men crowded into the back with Jon, and they jostled up a narrow road to where it crumbled into black cinders and a flat parking space. The thin guide kept up a constant patter of conversation in broken English; he grinned, he gestured with his battered hands and stared wildly around him like a frightened horse. He said his companion was mute, but could hear. He was his brother-in-law. He had been born that way. It was terrible, vastly terrible to be without a voice. How much, he wondered would a fine automobile like this one cost? At one point he drew a knife and Mrs. Sands flinched, but he only wanted to show it because the last man he had guided, a Swedish gentleman, had given it to him and it was made of the best Swedish steel. Jonathan's father did not have time to answer most of the questions.

For a while they walked through a barely sloping, tumbled land of black rock. Cinders worked their way into Jon's shoes. The mute walked ahead, the thin man behind. The leader would

point and nod from time to time and his brother-in-law told them what it was. At one point they came to a place where steam was escaping from a glistening crack. The thin man stooped and lit his cigarette from a smoking rock nearby.

"You see, signorino?" he said to Jon. "Sometimes people try to climb on here without guide." He wagged his finger. "No. This is an evil. There are bad places here on the mountain. It is not wise to go alone."

They rested before the final slope. It was becoming late afternoon. Mrs. Sands was worried whether they had enough time.

"No worry, Signora. Even in the dark we know the way."

Jon looked up the steep slope. It was covered with a fine-grained black sand. Already they were very high up. When he glanced back he could see the wasteland drop suddenly away from him and there was the coast, the gray ocean and sun already turning red. When he looked back he saw the two guides standing to one side. They were whispering to each other. His parents were looking at the view, separately. They had not spoken to each other since leaving the inn. Jon could not be sure but he thought he saw something pass between the two men, an object, dull-colored, that the mute put into his pocket. When the thin man saw Jon looking at them he let one hand shoot up impulsively and then he grinned, wild, twitching.

When they began to climb again the two guides insisted on taking his parents by their hands and pulling them up. The thin one went first with his mother.

"No, no, he said firmly. "Lean back. Trust me. Do nothing but lift your feet. Benissimo. The signorino is young. Let him make his own way."

The further up the slope they went, the steeper it seemed to get. Soon Jon was struggling against the rolling cinders and if he did not keep moving, he would begin sliding down again. He did not want to look down. He only kept going up because of his fear of gaining momentum and slipping not just down the hill, but in and under the loose hillside.

Suddenly there was nowhere else to go—a short, jagged rim and then the pit. They all stood there panting. Jon wanted to cry out but he could not move. He could see across the circumference of the rim, down its clawed sides and the hole darkening out of sight. The smell of sulphur stifled him. Wisps of smoke rose slowly along the sides. The light was failing. Abruptly a wind came up in gusts and flicked currents of cinders over the edge with a dry hiss.

"Look," said the guide, his frenzied hands now waving in

front of him, "look, what a beautiful sight. The mountain. E bel Vesuvio," and he began to laugh, high, nervous, a little mad.

Jon looked at them, the mute kneeling and staring down over the rim, his parents standing apart, expressionless, not touching, the guide ecstatic, muttering now, and suddenly the the night came as though it had rushed up and out of the center of the cone.

"No," he yelled. "No."

He could see only their white faces turning toward him.

"Watch out. They're going to kill us."

"Jon, what are you . . ."

Even as his mother spoke he saw the thin man moving to him.

"Che, cie?"

"He has a knife, I know it." He began to back away.

"What are you talking about?" came his father's voice, and then the thin man yelled something at him, he felt the cinders crumbling under his foot, threw his hands up toward them and saw the man lunge at him. The hand had him by the collar and Jon flailed at the arm, the grunting face. Then there was another pair of arms, his father's, and both men dragged him back from the edge.

"My God, Jon, what the hell do you think you're doing?" and his father shook him. He gave himself limply to the tense hands and sat abruptly when they let go.

The thin man was babbling at his mother, hands like white moths fluttering in the dark. His father tried to explain. No, his son was not subject to seizures, it was all a mistake, a misunderstanding. They were all too tired, and sometimes the imagination, and so forth. When the thin man came to Jon he had not stopped trembling yet. The face came close to him.

"Va bene, signorino?"

"Yes."

His father leaned down. "Jon, tell him you're sorry. Say 'mi dispiace'".

The man had his hand on Jon's knee. "Is okay. I understand. Not necessary."

"Mi dispiace," Jon said, and feeling his throat lump, he looked away down the dark slope.

"Bene. Fa niente, signorino."

His father and mother and the guide were talking to each other again, and from time to time the man translated something to his companion.

Jonathan wept quietly. Finally the thin man began to

sing. It was a soft, intense baritone voice. He was singing something about beautiful Naples and the sea and the sun. The wind tossed cinders against Jon's hands. After a while he could see again and then he looked down at the long, curving shore, a sickle with its blade jewelled with lights, and the bright cluster of Naples, and even the island of Capri like a lonely, pendant gem. There were the chanting voice, the lights, the smell of sulphur, the knowledge of the long fall behind him and the sudden pricking out of all the stars. The song was repeated, beginning to be familiar. He was on the top of the mountain, and he was looking down now, seeing himself behind one of those lights, looking up as he had been only the night before.

Jon stood up. The mountain was dead after all. What they had told him was true; the dragon was deeply asleep, not dangerous now. He felt very powerful standing there over its curled body and all the treasure it had guarded. He looked at his parents. They were standing closer together, his father's hand on his mother's shoulder. When they moved apart briefly he took their hands and stood between them. They were talking quietly over his head about the long way down.

"It's all right, isn't it?" he said.

"What?" and they paused for a moment in their conversation, but he did not answer.

The guide was naming the stars, a chant like the quiet telling of beads.

"It's so beautiful," his mother said, and his father was holding his hand almost too tightly.

It did not take long to descend. Most of the way down they only had to hit on their heels and slide, and when they went too fast, the guides, who stayed ahead, caught them and they all suddenly found it very funny. Jonathan had not laughed so hard for a long time. Back at the inn the guides insisted that they have a drink, so they all had a glass of *Lacrima Christi* and his father bought two bottles because it was so good.

"Here it is best made," said the thin man. "With our grapes. But," and his lips turned down bitterly, "other places, they have stolen the name."

His father wondered if they had paid them too much, but his mother said she thought they deserved it. Jon was very sleepy. He listened to them laughing and talking quietly in the front seat for a while and then, because the wine began to make him feel as though he was floating, he closed his eyes—the better to see the dark, warm cave, the dragon coiled on his bed of smooth stones and in the moonlight his coat glistening rich

with rubies and diamonds and pearls like smooth ripe grapes bursting with an inner light.

Once they stopped because of a wedding party that had spilled out onto the street of a small town. The people stood in a circle, gave way to the car slowly, and in the center were musicians and the bride and groom who danced in slow circles, unaware of them, she in long and lacy white and he, thick-necked, a little clumsy but smiling at her half-veiled face as they turned and turned until they passed over the cobblestones and through the crowd and the musicians followed after them.

Then they were back on the highway and Jon watched the rippled path of the moon that followed them like a silver tether all the way back to Naples.

Doves Exist

ANTHONY HARRINGTON

Doves exist
With their drumaway
White flicker of quicktail flight
To remind us
Of the possibilities
Inherent in even the clumsiest
Gaited, fat and wobbly
Pigeon.

Marginalia . . .

(continued)

Poems come out of a historical moment, and since they are written in language, the form is tied to a whole cultural context.

What is wrong with that human being telling us something about the specific problem or the historical moment which engendered the poem? Perhaps such information would do much to close the gap between the contemporary poet and his reader. Certainly it is a fact that many educated readers have turned away from poetry in frustration, feeling that they cannot understand poems which have become increasingly personal and obscure. They seem to be acting on an unspoken feeling that the poet is somehow not playing fair with the reader, who is presented with the end product of a long, sometimes complicated creative process but locked out from any knowledge of the process itself.

The strange thing is that there is no lack of explanatory information about earlier poetry—only about poems by contemporaries. Any of the standard anthologies for students provide excellent notes and glosses that give the students a cultural and biographical context to help them read Yeats, for example. Readers are told what happened in Easter 1916, who Maud Gonne was, and what a gyre means in Yeats' cyclical view of history.

The editors of that standard college text, The Norton Anthology of English Literature, pride themselves because their introductions and notes "have freed the student from reliance on a reference library and enabled him to carry and read the book anywhere—in class, at home . . ., or under a tree." I'd like to see the reader of Richard Wilbur, or Sylvia Plath, or Philip Larkin have the same freedom to take the book under a tree and read it with pleasure and understanding.

If I could persuade poets to be kinder to us readers, I'd ask them to tell us something about the specific problem which provoked the poem. If there was a personal or cultural context that the reader could not reasonably discern from the poem, the poet ought to share that with his reader. I'd prefer an afterword rather than an introduction. The reader should be allowed to meet the poem with a completely free imagination. Should the experience be satisfactory, he might ignore the afterword or even choose to disagree with it, saying, "Well, that's all well and good, but I still like my reading better; you've said far more in this poem than you know." But should the reader find

certain key ideas, images, or allusions unfathomable without biographical, historical, or mythological research, the afterword would be a friendly gesture by the poet, enabling the reader to go out under the tree instead of off to the reference library.

I wanted to test my idea with the poetry in this issue, but this magazine's deadlines and the speed of the Postal Service proved incompatible. Though I did not ask the poets in this issue to write an afterword, I did glean some additional information from their letters. Before you read further in this column, I'd like you to turn to page 16 and read Ruth Moon Kempher's two poems.

* * *

Now that you're back, I'll tell you what Ruth told me in her letter. "I had put 80,000 miles on my car traveling mostly between Atlanta and St. Augustine, working on my Ph.D.; the miles were adding up on me, too. So I elected to write a Master's thesis and take my comprehensive exam . . . All eighty Hilda Notes were written while I was studying for the comprehensives. The only way I knew to keep my sanity while poring over the required texts." I suggest that such information is most helpful in understanding the reason for the many literary allusions in the poems. Unless the reader has been studying for a doctoral examination also, I doubt that he will recognize Gondal and Angria as mythical kingdoms created by the Bronte sisters. (I had to look it up.)

Some will surely label me Philistine of the Month for this proposal, charging that I am unwilling to let the poem stand on its own, or that I expect the poet to provide an explication of his own poem. I plead not guilty to both charges.

What I am saying is that the convention of printing poems without any comment by the poet needs to be re-examined by poets, editors, and publishers. A convention of any sort implies a tacit agreement between the artist and the audience. From the large number of readers who comfortably ignore contemporary poetry, it is apparent that many have withdrawn their agreement to accept poetry on conventional terms. If poets are not to find themselves playing private word games as personal therapy, they must rediscover the communicative pleasures of poetry, which may lead them to see that there is nothing subversive or patronizing about sharing more of the poetic process with the reader.

—J. J. K.

CONTRIBUTORS

SYDNEY SCOTT lives in Austin, Texas, with her husband and two children. She had been working on a doctorate at the University of Texas but gave it up to devote more time and energy to her writing. She is presently working on a novel. *Four Quarters* is pleased to present her first published story in this issue. Before taking his present position teaching English at Rappahannock Community College in Warsaw, Virginia, RON CARTER had been a technical writer, advertising copywriter, and, from 1963 to 1967, an officer in the U.S. Navy. His poetry has appeared in *Georgia Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Mademoiselle*, and elsewhere. RUTH MOON KEMPHER, whose poems have appeared here previously, writes that she now lives "on five acres of Florida piney woods, with old Cracker farm house, creek, rattlesnakes and all." The "Hilda Halfheart's Notes to the Milkman" which appear in this issue are but two of the eighty Hilda has penned. MICHAEL KOCH has recently accepted a fellowship in writing at Wichita State University. A graduate of La Salle, Michael has served an occasional stint as bartender-waiter and observer of human nature. P.W. GRAY'S poems have appeared before in these pages. He serves as poet-in-the-schools in Omaha, Nebraska. JOSEPH MEREDITH teaches creative writing at La Salle and is poetry editor of this magazine. He and his wife Jeanne have recently welcomed their first-born, Andrew, who successfully invoked his father's reluctant muse. DAN RODDEN, Professor of English at La Salle, was one of the founding fathers of *Four Quarters*, its second editor, and a regular theatre critic for us back in the early 1950's. M.L. HESTER has published in the *St. Andrew's Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Colorado Quarterly*, *Confrontation* and *Southern Humanities Review*. T. ALAN BROUGHTON of the University of Vermont has been a regular and valued contributor. His poems have won several awards and appeared in many periodicals. This is his second story to appear here. ANTHONY HARRINGTON lives in Marietta, Georgia.

Editor: John J. Keenan

Poetry Editor: Joseph Meredith

Associate Editor: James Butler

Business Manager: Patricia Shields

Art Editor: James Hanes

Editorial Associates: Robert T. Fallon, Howard L. Hannum, John Christopher Kleis, Claude Koch, Barbara C. Millard, Caryn M. Musil, P. Sreenivasa Rao, John J. Seydow, Edward P. Sheekey, F.S.C., Ralph Thornton, Barbara Uittenbogard.